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SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT LITERACY CURRICULUM WRITING SEMINAR.
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A CONFERENCE WAS HELD TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND A FUSED CURRICULUM IN BEGINNING READING. THE CURRICULUM HAD BEEN DEVELOPED AND TENTATIVELY EVALUATED AS PART OF "PROJECT LITERACY," A BASIC RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM-DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN AREAS OF EDUCATION RELEVANT TO THE ACQUISITION OF LITERACY SKILLS. THE FOCUS OF THE CURRICULUM WAS ON A TOTAL LITERATE ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPING NOT ONLY THE CHILD'S BASIC READING SKILLS, BUT HIS HANDWRITING, PHONICS, AND LISTENING SKILLS AS WELL. THE TOPICS EXPLORED AND DEVELOPED IN THE CONFERENCE WERE--(1) CODE MEDIUMS FOR RELATING WRITTEN LANGUAGE TO SPEECH, (2) METHODS FOR DETERMINING AND INSURING READING READINESS IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS, (3) ABILITIES NEEDED BY YOUNG CHILDREN BEFORE BEGINNING FORMAL READING INSTRUCTION, (4) LEARNING LETTER AND SOUND CORRESPONDENCES, (5) APPROACH TO AND SEQUENCING OF HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION, (6) CHOOSING AND PREPARING READING MATERIALS, (7) CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION AND ABILITY GROUPING, (8) COMBINING COUNTING, SORTING, AND MATCHING, SIZE CONCEPTUALIZATION, AND OTHER LEARNINGS WITH READING, (9) OVERALL GOALS OF READING INSTRUCTION, AND (10) THE USE OF TECHNICAL AIDS IN THE CLASSROOM. A RELATED REPORT IS AA 000 023. (JH)

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P.A. 24

Summary of the Project Literacy Curriculum Writing Seminar

Cornell University

June 15 - July 15, 1966

The conference opened with a report of the year's reading program that had been tried in a first grade and two kindergartens. Discussion of the report[1] led to the formation of sub-groups to consider various aspects of the curriculum. During the course of the conference several speakers presented their views on reading or the results of research in some area pertinent to reading skills.

Each group at some point discussed the postulates[2] upon which the year's program was built. In the main, these postulates were accepted as reasonable assumptions and revisions were suggested to bring the reading program into closer conformity to the stated aims. Several meetings were given over to discussion of possible programs based on different assumptions and different roads to the same ends. For the most part, these discussions led to decisions about possible laboratory research rather than to major changes in the present curriculum.

The following reports and recommendations emerged from the seminar:

1. Coding

The pre-reading Unit on Codes[3] in relation to language was considered by most participants as one of the most exciting parts of the program. Its values are seen to be manifold. Besides the original aim of teaching a cognitive approach to reading as a way to give the young

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1. See summary of First Grade Study, 1965-1966. Project Literacy, Mimeo 80 pp. & Appendices.
2. See summary, Summer Seminar, 1966. Project Literacy, Mimeo 6 pp.
3. See Summary of Coding Unit, 1966. Project Literacy, Mimeo, 13 pp. & Appendices.

child concepts about the relation of written to spoken language, there were other positive aspects. Some of these are as follows:

1) A games approach to language which give freedom and flexibility to a program of oral language development.
2) A highly motivating introduction to reading.
3) A raison d'etre for phonics from the child's point of view.
4) A vehicle for introducing the visual and perceptual skills necessary to reading.
5) An operational device for building initial concepts of letter, word, and sentence.

In the light of the promise of this Unit it was revised during the seminar to correct weaknesses which showed up during the Spring try-out in two kindergarten classrooms. At present the Unit covers the following points:

1) There are different code mediums which can be used to represent the spoken language (gestures, sounds, lights, pictures, symbols).

Children and teacher devise simple codes and classroom situations in which these codes can be used to send messages. The room light, flashlight, drum, hand gestures and simple written symbols are used.

2) An individual signal in the code may represent a whole message (meaning) unit, a word, or a sound in a word.

In the gesture, sound and light codes which were developed, one signal is used to stand for a whole message. When written symbols are introduced the symbol first stands for a phrase, then each word is represented by a symbol. Letters are introduced as standing for sounds in words.

3) The meanings of signals used in the code must be agreed upon by both the sender and the receiver of the message.

This is repeated in the development of all the codes using the ignorance of an absent child, children in another classroom or parents, about the meaning of the code to illustrate the aggrement.

4) The signals representing meaning units in the code must be presented in the same order as the meaning units used in the spoken message it represents. (In some mediums this will entail representing temporal order by spatial order.)

This is illustrated with abstract or iconic symbols. Change in order either changes meaning or produces a "silly" sentence.

5) The choice of code medium must be such that the message will reach the intended receiver. This choice is affected by the physical relationship of the sender and receiver; therefore the visibility, the audibility and the permanence of the signal must be considered in choosing an appropriate code medium.

Games are used which vary the relationship between receiver and sender (child in coatroom, outside door, behind blackboard, absent from school, etc.) Through testing different mediums the children discover which codes are effective under which conditions.

6) The written code taught in school is one in which symbols called letters are used to represent sounds in the <u>order</u> in which they are spoken. It has the characteristic of being a <u>permanent</u> code, therefore, we learn to write it and to read it.

Initial letter of first name is used as introduction to the concept that letters stand for sounds. The initial stands for the first sound in the name. The letters <u>a</u> and <u>t</u> are substituted for the symbol for <u>at</u>. Words <u>cat</u>, <u>bat</u> and <u>hat</u> are developed and used in symbol sentences pointing out visual and auditory identity. Rhyming is discussed.

Later, after phonics have been introduced the concepts of this unit are reviewed.

As the lessons progress, the child is able to conceptualize a variety of communication modes. Some expected outcomes are that the child will understand the arbitrary nature of written language, the importance of sentence order to meaning and the left-right orientation used in reading.

The Coding Unit can be used in the second semester of kindergarten or in the first semester of first grade. The first grade teacher may wish to eliminate or consolidate some of the lessons when the responses of the children indicate that they do not need as much review as is built into the unit.

2. Other Pre-reading Activities

1) It was decided that the names of letters will be taught, the instruction beginning very soon after the start of school in conjunction with a combined auditory-visual discrimination program for those whose tests show they need it. (The regular reading program will be initiated with those students who show they do not need pre-reading activities.) Individual practice on the primary typewriter will be carried on in conjunction with this program. These segments of the curriculum have been dubbed sub-routines and are meant to be given only when it is found that specific children can profit from the particular content.

2) In order to discover abilities and capabilities of the incoming children tests will be given in September to judge the following:

   a. Ability to read Clappy the Clown test.

   b. Pointing to individual words while Clown story is read.

c. Naming letters of the alphabet.

d. Visual matching of letters.

e. Test of semantic and syntactic competence.

f. (The School System gives the Metropolitan Reading Rediness Test.)

[Failure on these tests may indicate the necessity for further testing of perceptual skills with an instrument like the Frostig Developmental Test of Visual Perception.]

g. After some initial exposure to the kind of response required, an auditory discrimination test of letter sounds will be given.

Several other informal tests may be given and data collected from observations.

3) A child should demonstrate ability in the following areas at the beginning reading period.

a. Child points to left side of page.

b. Child points to top-bottom of page.

c. Child visually discriminates whether initial, medial, final pairs of letters are same-different in a minimally and maximally contrasted set of trigrams.

d. i. Child recognizes that two words rhyme.

ii. Child supplies rhyme to a given word.

e. i. Child can categorize objects by beginning sounds.

ii. Child can recognize which word in a set does not begin with the same sound.

iii. Child discriminates word pairs minimally and maximally contrastive in initial consonant only.

4) In conjunction with the correspondence program the child will continue to receive practice in auditory-visual discrimination by doing such tasks as --

   a. Filling in missing letter - initial, final (stim=spoken word).

   b. Indentifying learned words.

   c. Attempting to identify unknown word, all elements of which have been presented in other words.

3. Correspondences

The program was revised with the following considerations in mind. We do not know explicitly how much training a child needs before he has sufficient phonic cues to pronounce a new word. Given a reading program which attempts to balance the kinds of cues available (semantic, syntactic, phonic), the teaching of relationships between sound and letter units takes its place as part but not the major part in the program. The research of Hockett, Venezky, Levin and Gibson is reflected in the program which is designed to introduce units of varying sizes including morpheme and syllable units; and which emphasizes initial position or final position particularly when a consonant is in that position. This research encourages a set for diversity by early introduction of different vowel values which depend on the graphic environment.

Frequency, productivity in terms of number of examples generated, and separation by as many distinctive features as possible were considerations in choosing the initial set of stimuli.

A. General approach: Details of classroom procedure have not been completely worked out. However:

1) Whole words are used to demonstrate similarities and contrasts.

2) New words are built by adding to a previously presented limited inventory of letters occurring in words.

3) Words are presented both in isolation and in sentences.

4) Many concepts are presented early. Standards of mastery may be low initially, since the same concepts constantly recur and are reviewed.

5) Provisions for informal testing and more detailed sub-routines are to be supplied.

6) It is assumed that useful words that are irregular will be presented in other parts of the reading program and should not be formally analyzed here.

3. General Sequence:

1) Early letters were chosen to form whole words.

2) Later letters were chosen, not only to expand the inventory of words, but to provide practice on previously presented letters.

3) Correspondences requiring new concepts are alternated with regular, but progressively less frequent, correspondences. (A statement of the sequence is available.)

4. Handwriting

Current handwriting systems were examined and many inconsistencies discovered. Data are meager on rationale for letter formation, size of letter, width of line, or kind of tool. Occasionally, a statement such as "research has shown" occurs but never with a clarifying footnote. Search for empirical findings proved fruitless.

A handwriting program was prepared whose main objective is to get children to write legibly but not necessarily beautifully as soon as possible so as to allow production to operate as another mode to reinforce concurrent learnings.

A. Approach: After working with several children at a Head-Start Project, it was decided that size of line could be 1/2 in. for initial teaching (much smaller than usual), the size of the pencil (fat or thin) will be the choice of the child, that some letters are "hard" to write no matter which way the child is asked to form the letter.

The formation of letters is in general from top to bottom, left to right, and when possible, in continuous strokes without lifting the pencil. These observations were not meant to take the place of real research on handwriting but to give some cues for a practical program.

Chalkboard practice and tracing with a pencil were omitted from the program but it was decided to try finger tracing of letters as an early procedure both to help communicate form and the method for producing it, and to help establish rhythm in making the letters. Children will then immediately write the letters on their own with a pencil. As soon as possible, letters will be incorporated into words and words into sentences to help focus attention on spacing and to provide for integration with the reading and phonics programs.

Until handwriting skills become operational, children will use typewriter, paste in pre-cut letters, or perhaps even use a primitive printing press to communicate.

B. Sequencing: A sequence of letters was set up based on the letter forms, putting easiest letters early and grouping letters that are made similarly. This sequence was then modified so that the first letters introduced in phonics would be taught fairly early in handwriting.

It was decided that a few capital letters that are similar to the lower case forms will be taught concurrently with some of the first lower case forms. The more irregular capitals will be taught in handwriting after the rest of the lower case forms are introduced. The children, however,

will be exposed to the capital forms of all letters in prepared materials and have identification and matching practice with the forms before they practice writing them.

5. Choosing and Preparing Reading Materials

After a child has had an initial introduction to reading, a variety of choices are available for presenting him with appropriate reading matter. It is in the very first reading stage that specific criteria must be set up.

It was decided that the child's initial exposure to reading be in the form of "teacher-composed" sentences. These sentences will serve several purposes. First, they will contain information or directions having to do with classroom tasks and therefore exemplify the communication aspects of written language; second, they will contain certain common words and phrases which the child will learn to respond to automatically prior to meeting these same words in a printed text; third, the statements can be permuted into questions, or commands, and word slots can be filled by other instances of the same parts of speech, thus requiring the child to manipulate sentence structure very early in the program; finally, these sentences bridge the Coding Unit, and allow an easy transition from pre-reading to reading as well as provide some examples of letter-sound relationships to be taught in the handwriting and correspondence programs.

Nursery rhymes will also be presented during this stage to make use of the familiar jingle to teach rhymes, match words and letters and to teach other discrimination skills.

Writing materials for beginning reading presents many problems. The participants of the seminar saw the major task as one of constructing materials to make use of a restricted repertoire of words and sentence patterns that, taken together, yield material which is highly redundant and

yet capable of sustaining interest. The materials should reflect neither an artificial style -- "Look! Look! See the plane!-- nor inappropriate structures or vocabulary-- "Although Jane wanted to go, she was not altogether certain if it were possible for her to do so."

Appropriate format was considered, including size of booklet, style of type, amount and organization of the print on the page, length of story, and the use of pictures. The recommendations received from the sub-group indicated that sentences should not be restricted to only one line; carry-over sentences should be introduced quite early. "Chunking" of immediate constituents can be used to make decisions right-hand side divisions of lines. Accompanying pictures should be given low priority. Short selections were considered preferable so that children could read in one or two days a complete selection of anywhere from 8 to 25 words. The words included can ignore certain phonic irregularities in order to make use of the criterion of frequency -- common words. Function words can be learned in context of phrase units; interrogative and relative pronouns should be introduced similtaneously; and contractions, which are usually avoided for no apparent reason, should be included. When printed texts are introduced parallel pages should be typed occasionally using more colloquial forms so that children can compare the differences in style.

6. Classroom Organization and Day to Day Problems

Continued use of trade books was recommended with better records kept of books read by individual children. Stress on oral reading should be diminished and silent reading be encouraged early. Reading errors should be corrected by the child himself if at all possible. To build up speed and use of context the teacher will tell the missing word during oral reading.

Organization of children into ability groups for reading was considered and alternate ways of grouping the children discussed; teacher-pupil, pairs of pupils, whole class, ad hoc groups who need specific training or review were considered good alternatives. Flexibility of grouping is the object. This would necessitate a different schedule of observation. It was suggested the activities of several children be observed intensively, that free time reading activities be observed to determine levels of interest, performance and long-run learning values, that a sample of the instructional reading period be tape recorded but not so intensively as last year. The observer should note child's attention to the task during these groups. There were many suggestions for organizing that time during reading which the child does not spend with the teacher. Non-teacher tasks were designed to provide immediate feedback to the student as well as a permanent record for the teacher and observer. Most of these devices involved discrimination tasks.

7. Combining Other Learnings with Reading

The Coding Unit offers opportunities to consider numbers as symbols compared to words or letters as symbols.

Counting: several trade books combine a good story line and give material appropriate to counting and other mathematical lessons.

Size: SMSG includes good lessons on appropriate use of -er, -est endings for comparative and superlative concepts. Other words such as long, wide, etc., are also treated.

Sorting and Matching: sets of numbers, sets of nouns, sets of pictures, which represent the same words, e. g., "run" or "get"; use of attribute blocks.

Concepts of inside - outside, in - on, etc.

Oddity task: Passages for comparison in which two of three sentences are the same and one is different.

In science learning in first grade the tasks are mostly exploratory; combining reading and writing comes only when the child is ready to record or sees the need to go outside his own experience for additional information.

8. Overall Goals of Reading Program

Criteria were defined through an attempt to construct evaluation procedures to be used at the end of the program. It can be assumed that the child has learned the various reading skills taught if he gives correct responses to the items presented. Several categories of reading skills as well as attitude toward reading were delineated for the evaluation procedures. These categories are presented below for each of the particular evaluation procedures. Although not presented here, sample items for some areas have been devised.

The evaluation will include the following:

1) Writing to speech correspondences.

2) Reading.

a. intonation

b. comprehension: three levels

(1) simple comprehension - context provides all information.

(2) simple inference - context and mimimum of information from child.

(3) complex inference - context plus problem solving or judgments based on context.

(phonic, syntactic, and semantic cues will be systematically varied in the above)

c. critical reading - does the passage fulfill expectations given the title and opening sentence?

3) Attitude toward reading

a. rank order choices of various activities including reading.

b. child's self-evaluation of present and future reading skills.

c. child's evaluation of what is good reading (use of tapes of first grade children reading - possibly including himself).

9. Use of Technology

One area which will continue to be explored and developed is the use of technical aids in the classroom.

The children will listen to tape recorded stories which they can read simultaneously. These will continue to include a variety of stories considered good literature but the repertoire will be expanded to include selections read immediately prior to their introduction in a reading group, stories for review, unfinished tales, etc. The tape-recorded will also be used as an aid to composing stories. We envision the child telling a story into the tape-recorder, receiving a transcript of it which he (and the class) can then listen to and read simultaneously.

One typewriter will be placed in each classroom. Its use will vary as the year progresses: in the beginning it can give extra practice in auditory and visual discrimination as well as sound-letter correspondences, and later serve as means of communication among the children.

Other possibilities were discussed during the seminar, and their feasibility is now being investigated. A simple teletypewriter system could be set up using two typewriters at which pairs of children could write messages to each other; a simple printing press could be obatined; an overhead projector could be used as an aid in teaching handwriting or

phonics. It was noted that business and industry have made prompt use of mechanical aids of all sorts as soon as they have become marketable. A sub-goal of this project if to introduce certain technical aids and specify how these can be most useful in an educational setting.

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